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SUBJECT: Dec. 14 Opposition Protests Met by Tear Gas; Up to 100
Demonstrators Arrested

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1400 B) KHARTOUM 1378 C) KHARTOUM 1376 D) KHARTOUM
1359

11. (SBU) Summary: Government of Sudan (GOS) authorities shut down a demonstration led by northern opposition parties in Omdurman on Monday, December 14, blocking roads and bridges in the early morning. Following a rally at the Omdurman headquarters of Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minnawi (SLM/MM), approximately 300 demonstrators attempted to march a short distance to the National Assembly at 12:30 p.m., but GOS police arrested up over 100 demonstrators and dispersed the crowd. By 2:00 p.m. the rally had regrouped at the SLM/MM compound, which GOS police had surrounded, firing tear gas canisters inside, and arresting those who attempted to leave. End summary.

12. (SBU) Anticipating a protest similar to the truncated demonstration led by members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) on December 7 (ref B), GOS police and additional security services blocked roads and bridges leading to the riverside Government of National Unity (GNU) National Assembly building in Omdurman in the early morning of December 14. A small number of protesters gathered but was quickly dispersed, continuing the event at the Omdurman headquarters of SLM/MM. Numerous luminaries from northern opposition parties, including the Umma Party, the Popular Congress Party (PCP), and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), joined SLM/MM officials to rally for unity as the "Juba Alliance" of opposition parties. Although some lower-level representatives from SPLM-Northern Sector were in attendance, SPLM sources reported that General Secretary Pagan Amun's and SPLM Head of Northern Sector Yasir Arman's attempt to travel to the demonstration from Khartoum was blocked by GOS Police at the bridge crossing to Omdurman.

13. (SBU) At 12:30 p.m., following a series of speeches by opposition leaders at SLM/MM headquarters, a group of approximately 300 protesters commenced a march toward the National Assembly. According to the UN and march participants, six separate uniformed GOS police and security forces met the marchers as they proceeded to the National Assembly, and arrested some high-profile protesters while using excessive force and tear gas to disperse the crowd. The UN estimated that up to 100 participants were arrested following today's demonstration, including opposition luminaries such as Miriam Al-Sadiq (Umma Party), Adballa Al-Neen (PCP), Hidir Abdi (SPLM-Northern Sector), Mohammed Nugud (Communist), and Ali Hussein Dousa (SLM/MM). Mubarak Al Fadil (DUP) told CDA he had been teargassed and narrowly avoided arrest. SLM/MM estimated that seven high-ranking members of their party had been arrested. One opposition source reported that 122 demonstrators had been arrested, divided between two police jails in Omdurman. The source reported that less than 20 had been released from police custody by 5:00 p.m., while the UN did not report any arrested demonstrators had been released.

14. (SBU) By 2:00 p.m., demonstrators had regrouped at SLM/MM headquarters to revise their strategy in the wake of the arrests. According to witnesses, Sudanese police and security forces surrounded the compound, and fired what witnesses reported to be a potent form of tear gas into the compound from outside at approximately 2:20 p.m. Several opposition party members attempted to leave the compound and were immediately arrested. Witnesses reported that one SPLM vehicle attempted to leave the compound and was chased by National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) vehicles, until a NISS vehicle collided with the SPLM vehicle, causing a serious accident with an unknown number of injuries. By 5:00 p.m., demonstrators inside SLM/MM headquarters noted that the situation was less tense than it had been earlier in the day, but GOS police and security forces still surrounded the building.

15. (SBU) Post alerted American citizens in Sudan to the potential for violence with the following Warden Message on December 14: "This Warden Message alerts American citizens in Sudan to the potential for violence, and road and bridge closures, due to anti-government demonstrations on December 14, 2009. The potential for violence between security forces and demonstrators is high. American citizens should take care to avoid areas near government buildings or ministries in Khartoum, where such demonstrations are usually held. The bridges linking Khartoum and Omdurman have been closed to traffic, and American citizens should be prepared to alter their usual transportation routes in the event of further road or bridge closures, which may happen with no advance notice. American citizens should stay current with media coverage of local events and be aware of their surroundings at all times."

16. (SBU) Comment: Although it appears that the SPLM has patched up its differences with the NCP for the time being (ref A), the Juba

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Alliance of northern opposition parties is chomping at the bit for the opportunity to provoke the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Ostensibly, today's demonstration was to protest the as-yet-untabled National Security Act, which ironically is the same law which grants GOS security services the authority to arbitrarily arrest and hold peaceful demonstrators. With the SPLM now reverting back to its traditional role as a semi-reliable GNU partner, future demonstrations will depend on the ability of the somnolent northern opposition parties to tap into public resentment over NCP policies. However, given Khartoum's disaffected and apathetic populace, rousing the public to the streets will be a tall order, even without the risk of truncheons and tear gas. End comment.

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